

High Score for 'Social' Video Games, Study Finds

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As the Beatles Rock Band and Wii Fit top the Christmas charts, new research from the University of Birmingham reveals that social interactions are key to designing a hit video game.

Findings suggest the most important elements of good game design include variety, cohesion, a good social aspect and good user interaction, while bad pricing should be avoided.

Researchers have been analysing hundreds of reviews of a wide range of games to find out what factors provide a positive gaming experience to benefit, designers, reviewers and consumers.

Russell Beale, one of the research team, said: "Social elements such as competing alongside the rest of the family or playing as part of a multiplayer online community are perhaps stronger than were originally considered. One of the most interesting findings is that a bad environment and bad storytelling do not have as significant an impact on game success as has been previously thought."

Dr Beale said that while designers should take all the elements of a game into consideration, just one or two characteristics done well can still lead to success. The team's findings show that cheaper games with heavy social interaction score higher reviews on ranking sites than more expensive and less social games with better graphics and storylines.

The continued growth of the video games market means consumers regularly turn to popular online review web sites to inform their decision making. The findings could provide a useful tool for game companies and developers to aid product design and to provide a guideline for reviewers.

Dr. Beale added: "Gamers often rely on review sites to make purchasing decisions and so a game that receives a high average review score will have considerably better sales than a bad game. Therefore, it is desirable to know what makes a game get a good review rather than a bad or mediocre review. What earns a game a good review and what features should be prioritised to make it successful."

"These results could be useful to game designers to ensure they are including the most important criteria in their game design and producing a product that scores highly in reviews. Reviewers can check they are covering the key criteria well enough in their reviews, which should help consumers make better choices. Buyers can assess the expressiveness of a review, and then assess whether a game itself is worth buying."

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What makes a good game? Using reviews to inform design

Russell Beale or Matthew Bond advanced interaction group, school of computer science, University of Birmingham

[1] R. Beale and M. Bond, "What makes a good game? Using reviews to inform design," presented at HCI 2009 - 23rd Annual Conference on Human-Computer Interaction, Cambridge, 2009.